

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -

BirdLife Zimbabwe

THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN ZIMBABWE

Member of IUCN, The World Conservation Union

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COMMITTEES

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	Humphrey Rees	Jean Tucker	241079
	Chris Rees		

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BEST WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

This has been a difficult year for everyone and I wish to thank all those who have participated in BirdLife activities; those who have taken the trouble to organise outings and meetings all over the country and report to us on them; those who have attended; those who have submitted observations for *Babbler*; the staff in the office who have supported national activities.

We live in Zimbabwe because it is a beautiful country with many wonderful people. Bird watching is a way to enjoy both and to recharge your batteries to help you cope with daily hassles and frustrations. Make a resolution to get out into the bush and watch birds with good people in 2004. If you need help with transport, contact a committee member in your area. See you next year! **Jennifer Carter**

2004 Subscriptions

Ordinary / Schools / family	\$5000	Junior	\$1000
Pensioners	\$1500	Institutional	\$10000

BABBLER DISTRIBUTION

PLEASE help us to minimise the cost of printing and distributing the *Babbler*. Email birds@zol.co.zw if you are willing to receive *Babbler* by email or can change to an address to where it can be delivered by hand. If receiving it by email, you will need Microsoft Word.

ACTIVITIES**NATIONAL**

Library: An important benefit of having our own premises is that the library collection has now been housed in a suitable building at the office. Certain volumes can now be borrowed by members by prior arrangement with the Librarian but there is still a large amount of work to be done before the library is fully operational.

MASHONALAND BRANCH**Regular outings**

Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sundays, 4 January and 1 February. TIME: 06:30. NEW PARKING AREA: A new picnic area has been provided where cars are secure. Turn left off Chiremba Road (coming from town) into Ford Rd. opposite Queensdale Shops and continue down to Blatherwick Rd. The gate is on Blatherwick to the right of Ford. Bring cash for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out. Also bring chairs and refreshments as there is a pleasant picnic area.

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sundays, 11 January and 8 February. Meet at 06.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments. Beginners are most welcome and spare binoculars will be available. We encourage members with children to attend.

Saturday 24 & Sunday 25 January: Marlborough Vlei walk with Alex Masterson

Meet at 6:30 a.m. Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd. turn left and continue to the new houses. Parking is in a short cul-de-sac with a small fenced off area at the end. Please bring a tip for the security guard and remember it can be quite wet underfoot so bring suitable footwear.

Sunday 22 February: Lake Mchilwaine Nat. Park: Meet at 06.30 a.m. at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Thursday evening meetings

15 January: Branch AGM which is on an informal basis when the Committee for 2004 will be decided. Reports will be given by David Dalziel (Mukuvisi), Richard Dennison (Chivero) and Ian Riddell (Marlborough Vlei). Pies are available and a variety of salads will be provided. Please bring a knife, fork and plate.

19 February: Slide Show Ian Riddell will show some more of his excellent slides.

Venue: Bowls Pavilion, Old Hararians Association, Drummond Chaplin Street, Milton Park. Time: 6.00 for 6.30 p.m. A cash bar and pies will be available. Security is provided.

If anyone would like to attend any meetings but doesn't have fuel or doesn't want to drive at night, please contact a committee member and we will try to arrange transport. Similarly, if anyone can offer transport to the meetings, please contact us.

Thursday outings to Marlborough Vlei

As there are two walks with Alex Masterson at the end of January, only one will be led by Ian Riddell on 8 January.

2nd and 4th Thursdays (8 January, 12 & 26 February). Meet at 4:00 p.m. provided Ian Riddell is available. For confirmation contact Ian on 339716 or gemsaf@mango.zw. Bring cash to pay for security. Directions: drive to the end of Princess Margaret Rd, turn left, continue to the new houses. Parking is in a cul-de-sac with a small fenced off area at the end.

MATABELELAND BRANCH**Monthly Outings**

Please contact Jean Tucker on 241079 or Margie Pearce on 247009 (h) about January meeting.

Friday 6 February 2004: Annual General Meeting. Matabeleland Branch: 6.00 p.m. followed by bring-and-share supper. Please phone Jean Tucker on 241079 or Julia Dupree on 246269 for details of venue etc.

Aisleby

CHRISTMAS VISIT: a visit to Aisleby, probably with a braai brunch, is planned during the Christmas holidays at a time and on a day to suit members. Anyone interested should phone Julia on 09-246269.

Please contact co-ordinators Julia on 232401 or Penny 244034 for details of times, where to meet and transport arrangements for the January and February visits. January is usually the annual Waterfowl Count which you won't want to miss!

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Contacts: Jane Clegg ☎ 020-65610 Bridget Holland ☎ 020-61369

Sunday 25th January: Hillside Golf Course, Mutare 6.30 a.m.

Sunday 29 February: Thompson's Vlei – Cecil Kop Game Reserve 6:30 a.m.

The Museum is the departure point and, PROVIDED PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE, binoculars may be arranged.

Karoi Bird Club

Co-ordinator: Kevin Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6358 or 011 408023

E-mail: mitch@africaonline.co.zw

Secretary: Merle Mitchell P O Box 398, Karoi ☎ 064-6436

ACTIVITIES

Rydings School Walks are conducted the first Saturday each month at 6.30 a.m.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Gweru: Contact Kevin Barry ☎ 054-27316

Masvingo: Contact Lynne Wilkins ☎ 039-63657

Kadoma: Outings will be held at 7.00 a.m. on the 3rd Saturday of each month.
Contact Margaret Parrock ☎ 068-22005 for details.

REPORTS**NATIONAL****BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE: MODULE IV – Canada May/June 2003**

Following on Dr. Chip Chirara's report on his trip to Slovenia late last year and my description of my Australian course in January/February, here are notes on my second trip for BirdLife Zimbabwe, this time to Canada in May/June. All this travelling has been funded by the RSPB who are also busy raising monies to cover the cost of each of the courses themselves. What RSPB and BirdLife International are trying to do is to improve the administrative skills and financial independence of a lot of small national bird clubs and nature clubs that they are presently financing and supporting around the world.

There were four main topics to the Canadian Module being "Research for Conservation", "Advocacy and Communication", "Negotiating and Influencing" and "Monitoring and Evaluation". Our presenters were all from RSPB. Paul Donald handled the first topic that I found most interesting. Most of what he had to say was directed at showing how information is already available and how to access it. Emphasis was laid on the contribution that 'citizen science' or fairly simple but consistent supplies of information gathered by amateurs can be used. It is a source of good evidence to bring about favourable policy decisions and actions from local and national Government bodies. There is so much that we can and should be doing in this regard within Zimbabwe. The second and third portions of the course were more

closely related to my own legal work than my birding activities to date. It was nevertheless good to see it all from a different perspective and it included guidance on press relations, TV interviews etc. The final sector, presented by Ken Smith and Rita Besana, the architects of the courses, were very well done and of as much potential use to the operations of Coghlan, Welsh and Guest as to those of BirdLife Zimbabwe.

Having re-entered bird club committee work myself and with Chip Chirara engaged full time on roaming aspects of the club's affairs, let us hope that we can together bring support to the Paxtons, Massdorps and others who have brought BirdLife Zimbabwe so far in recent years and let us hope that we can maintain and improve that progress in the future.

The course was held at a country inn some 80km northwest of Ottawa in the State of Quebec. Here our two francophone African representatives from Cameroon and Burkina Faso were quite at home. It was set in pretty forested surroundings with a 100 ha lake at the end of the garden, a couple of golf courses nearby and plenty of lakeside cottages and gardens. Course activities kept us occupied from 8:30 a.m. to 6 or 7:30 at night for eleven days on the trot but it was light at 4:30 a.m. and did not get dark until 9:30 p.m. so there was time for some birding early and late.

But it was hard work and it took me four days to get into double figures. The Loons on this and other lakes were super; so sleek and smart and much bigger than I expected, bigger even than our Egyptian Goose. The woodlands/forests had plenty of small colourful warblers which sang a lot but kept still in amongst the leaves at the tops of the trees. Nevertheless I did manage to pick four of them and I saw such typically Northern Hemisphere birds as Cedar Waxwing and indigo Bunting. There were also North American specials like Rivy...Hummingbird, Turkey Vulture and a couple of Icterids, a peculiarly American family that has several African representatives in totally different families on this continent. Their Meadow Lark is a snap for our Yellow-throated Longclaw and their Red-winged Blackbird would be a Fan-tailed Widowbird (Red-shouldered Widow) if it lived here. One of the most striking sights, however, was a wader sitting — or rather standing — on a power-line. Apparently this is what Upland Plovers do do and they don't wade at all!

After the course, my wife, Rose, joined me and we had trips to the Algonquin Park where we did get a moose, to another lakeside cottage and to Halifax on the Nova Scotia course. But in the three weeks that I was in Canada I only managed just over 70 birds.

In conclusion I must mention the magnificent hospitality and assistance that we received from the Canadian Nature Foundation and the welcome and assistance received from our own Zimbabwe diplomatic representatives in Ottawa. **Alex Masterson**, Vice-President BLZ.

HONDE VALLEY – Quality Birding at its Best

January and February are the months when everything really hangs out in Honde Valley's birding world. Anchieta's Tchagra, a somewhat uncommon local resident that holds the unwelcome distinction of being one of Zimbabwe's most threatened birds, suddenly becomes extremely conspicuous and easy to find. At this time, the males indulge in fluttering display flights high above their chosen breeding territories. Moustached Grass-warbler is another equally threatened species, cryptically coloured, restricted to short the rank grass, bracken and scattered bushes in Wamba marsh. While Moustached Grass-warblers don't indulge in any spectacular display flights, they have a very pretty trilling call and become extraordinarily confiding during the breeding season. ABERFOYLE is one of the few areas where, during January/February each year, birders can be guaranteed to find both Anchieta's Tchagra and Moustached Grass-warbler in the same field.

All the other local "specials" are still present in abundance, but migrant birds from the Northern Hemisphere are prominent at this time. Globally-threatened Blue Swallows are often found in small parties in the montane grasslands. Eleonora's Falcons can be found among the many thousands of Amur Falcons that roost in the clumps of exotic trees dotted around the countryside. The falcons are essentially insectivorous and migrate from their breeding grounds in Canary Islands eastwards through the Mediterranean to Cyprus, to Africa. The lucky birder may also happen to come across Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo and even Lesser Cuckoo here – both increasingly rare migrants from the north.

Buff-spotted Flufftail is a common enough bird but how many times do we actually get to see them? Here two flufftail species can be seen in one morning. Green Twinspot, Red-faced Crimsonwing, Red-backed Mannikin, Magpie Mannikin, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and Grey Waxbill can all be seen in the burnt parts of forests — burning stimulates good grass growth. Roberts's Warbler will be present in good numbers and Rufous-bellied Tit will be gracing the high-lying plateaux.

Other common or garden birds like Green-backed Woodpecker, Half-collared Kingfisher, African Finfoot, African Broadbill, Pallid Honeyguide, Red-winged Warbler, Narina Trogon and Palm-nut Vultures for the sundowners, and so on, will also be around in good numbers. You simply cannot afford to miss this spectacle, combined as it is with great hospitality, accommodation and food to suit all tastes.

I hope that the above has served to whet some appetites! **Abasi Jana**, BirdLife Education Officer (My better half and I are lucky enough to be spending Christmas at Aberfoyle. We hope Abasi will be there to help us find these exciting birds. We each got 16 lifers at Rusitu (see Mashonaland report below) and will obviously get more at Aberfoyle. We will report back to *Babbler*. Ed.)

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Quiz Evening — Thursday 15th October

A dozen regulars turned out for a fun quiz evening. Graham Carter set up two computers (thanks, Graham) with the Roberts' CD and four teams of three competed in 3 rounds using the quiz function provided on the CD. Each 'player' (team in our case) can be defined as a Twitcher, a Birder or a Beginner. Eight bird pictures are shown, with a name shown and/or a call heard and the team must select the matching bird by clicking on a picture with the mouse. Points are lost for incorrect selections. The teams had three rounds each using the same set up. At first, each team identified 15 birds but a timed round had to be introduced to sort out the men from the boys — so to speak. Unfortunately, you can't choose the distribution area to select the birds from and success can depend on the number of sea birds to identify. However, a good time was had by all and John Paxton's Red-faced Cisticolas team carried the day. **Jennifer Carter**

20 November 2003: BirdLife Education Committee Report Back

The Education team of Leslee Maasdorp, Clayton Zazu and Dorothy Wakeling gave 16 members an interesting and thought-provoking evening.

Clayton told us about the Bird Awareness Program in Chitungwiza and Chiota. He said that a new approach in the classroom is to get the children interested in birds by having competitions on birds. This increases interest and is also a measurement of the success of the program. Poems and drama are also used with schools being asked to write and present a play called "Why Birds Are Important". Before a bird walk, the children are shown slides of birds they might see and given scientific information and told African cultural stories about them. When the birds are then seen in the bush, there is a sense of accomplishment and excitement.

Another aspect of the program is to develop school grounds for people and birds by growing trees, shrubs and flowers that attract birds. This needs a lot of commitment from the schools. BirdLife Zimbabwe donates plants and would be grateful for any donations from members.

The Chitungwiza project has been on-going for a couple of years and has a number of schools fully involved. Chiota was brought in this year and creates its own set of problems. Leslee gave a workshop there and Clayton will be following up. (Mash branch visited Chiota in October — report in next *Babbler*.) Zachariah (in Chitungwiza) and Elisha Chipendo (in Chiota) have been very involved in the project and BirdLife is grateful for their help.

Leslee spoke of BirdLife Zim's new Education policy of setting up partnerships with other interested parties. With the help of BirdLife staff, such as Abasi, Clayton and Alice, and the Education committee, there are now committees running the Bird Awareness campaign at the Vumba and Hauna to enhance the sustainability. There have been successes and failures in these areas. Tanganda Tea Estate is another partner. Leslee is grateful the support of members, particularly Hugh Maasdorp, Dale Hanmer and Gisela Locherer.

Currently Leslee is trying to set up a partnership with the Campfire project and National Parks at Bvimba Forest which is home to a large number of Zimbabwe 'specials' (see next report). CAMPFIRE is

on the spot and can help National Parks support their man in the area, who is rather isolated and forgotten. She is also developing partnerships with Rio Tinto and the Malilangwe Trust.

Members can help BirdLife Education efforts by donating bird magazines, books, plants and PRIZES.

Jennifer Carter

CHIPINGE Area, 19-23 September 2003 (QDS: 2032B1, 2032B2 & 2032B3)

Our annual excursion to Rifa Education Camp had to be cancelled this year as it was fully booked up by schools. Fortunately, Mike Browne, the Operations Manager at Tanganda Tea Estates in Chipinge, had extended an open invitation to BLZ to visit the estates and the surrounding area. Mike particularly wanted us to carry out a bird survey at New Year's Gift Estate where a more environmentally friendly crop spraying system had been introduced a few years ago. Tanganda Tea Estates kindly gave us a 10% discount on accommodation at their Training Centre at New Year's Gift and we were pleased by the quality of this accommodation and the beauty of the garden in the grounds. As we eventually ended up with a full compliment of 15 people staying in the centre, we had the place to ourselves, which was a good thing as we had to get up at 4 a.m. for the Haroni/Rusitu trip!

We arrived by lunchtime on Friday the 19th, had a brief rest after lunch and then set out for a birding walk at about 3.30 p.m. I immediately made myself unpopular because I failed to wake Ken Wilson as I thought I should leave him to carry on sleeping. Fortunately Ken managed to join others who arrived later on a walk. For those who do not know New Year's Gift, it has a variety of habitats which consist of tall riverine forest, croplands, middle veld mixed woodland, miombo woodland and rocky cliffs. This variety of habitats means that a large potential variety of birds can occur here and we expected to find more species here than anywhere else in the Chipinge area. This proved to be the case by the end of our trip with 63% of the total species identified having been found here.

On this first walk the lifer birds were already starting to pile up for those who had not visited the eastern districts before and we managed to see Livingstone's Turaco, Sombre Greenbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and Collared Sunbirds out of this group. That evening Peter Caldwell-Barr kindly visited us so that we could make arrangements for him to lead us to the Haroni/Rusitu area on Sunday. Fortunately the Training Centre was able to provide us with tea, coffee, sandwiches and biscuits by 5.45 a.m. and packed brunches each day. This enabled us to set out early enough for the peak birding period just after dawn. This was especially critical for forest birds as one needs to hear their calls to find them most of the time. Our Saturday trip was to CHIRINDA FOREST and we had perfect weather for it as it was sunny and hot. Peter Caldwell-Barr had advised us to go to the National Parks Chalets in the northern section and walk along the circular drive from there. This proved to be sound advice as the birds kept us so busy that it took us about 3 hours to cover 2 km. Highlights here included Crested Guineafowl, Buff-spotted Flufftail calling, Tambourine Doves and Lemon Doves, African Emerald Cuckoo, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, White-eared Barbet, African Broadbill, Grey Cuckooshrike, Square-tailed Drongo, Yellow-streaked Greenbul and Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Olive Thrush, Red-capped Robin-chat and Swynnerton's Robin, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, Chirinda Apalis, Cape Batis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Olive Sunbird and Dark-backed Weaver. Not everyone managed to see some of the more difficult birds such as the Grey Cuckooshrike but I believe that we all had good views of the African Broadbill displaying by flying in a tight little circle and calling at the same time. After brunch on the lawn at the chalets we drove to the Big Tree side but did not see so many birds. We were struck by the fact that we appeared to be the only visitors on a day when, in previous years, the place would have been full of them. After an excellent introduction to forest birding the previous day some of us may have been wondering why we had to get up at 4 a.m. on Sunday to meet Peter at the Chimanimani junction by 4.30 a.m. for our trip to the Bvimba and Haroni forests. But if they did they were pleasantly surprised as Peter is an excellent guide and showed us some real specials. The day started off very misty but by the time we reached the Bvimba Forest on the Rusitu River about 2 hours later the mist had cleared and the day was starting to really warm up. We spent a few hours birding here and then went and had a look at the remnant strip of Haroni Forest and the Makurupini Forest across the river. We could not get into the Makurupini Forest as the Haroni River was too deep and the forest paths had overgrown while Peter was overseas for several months. It was in this area that Peter managed to pick up Woodward's Batis, but no one else managed to see it. On our return to the Bvimba Forest we stopped and had a look at the campfire chalets which looked well set up and quite pleasant. Back at Bvimba forest Peter managed to

show me my only 2 lifers on this trip in the form of the Tiny Greenbul and the Black-headed Apalis. We also had very good views of a Bat Hawk and a Green Malkoha and Black-throated Wattle-eyes were like trash birds. Other highlights included an Egyptian Vulture flying high overhead, Martial Eagle, Black Sparrowhawk, Blue-spotted Wood-dove on the escarpment, Half-collared Kingfisher and Giant Kingfisher, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Green-backed Woodpecker calling, Pale Batis, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Red-throated Twinspot and Grey Waxbill.

The great weather could not last forever so it was no surprise when Monday dawned to overcast, windy and drizzly weather. We visited one of the Tanganda estates known as Petrunella in the morning and then continued with our bird survey at New Year's Gift in the afternoon. At Petrunella the company has set up a guest lodge for VIP visitors and the environment consists of croplands, 2 dams, small patches of riverine forest and hillsides covered in miombo woodland. Those that had sufficient energy went up the hill and had a fairly good view of a Scaly-throated Honeyguide that I had seen in the same spot in May 2002. We also picked up African Dusky Flycatcher and Striped Pipit. Lower down the highlights included Red-necked Spurfowl calling, Burchell's Coucal, Singing Cisticola and African Firefinch plus others already observed elsewhere. The total species count was 72.

On the last day we did our last bird walks before breakfast in guti weather at New Year's Gift and focused more on the miombo woodland in the hills than on the lower areas surveyed previously. This added several new species including good views of a Narina Trogon which Ian Riddell managed to call up without a tape. New Year's Gift gave us a total of 125 species and other highlights from there included Klaas's Cuckoo, African Scops-owl and African Barred Owlets, Woodland Kingfisher, Familiar Chats and Mocking Cliff-chats, Bearded Scrub-robin, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Red-faced Crombec and Red-headed Weaver. The total bird count was a pleasing 197 with most of us getting lifers. Thank you to Mike Browne and Peter Caldwell-Barr for all their help in making this trip a success. **Richard Dennison**

30 November: RIO TINTO "Birds in the Environment" walk at CLEVELAND DAM / HAKA PARK (QDS: 1731C3)

A good turnout of 31 people braved a grey damp morning to help Rio Tinto celebrate the annual "Birds in the Environment" walk. Rio Tinto plan to help Environment Africa clean up the Cleveland Dam area which is why we chose to meet here. There were 16 people from Rio Tinto and we wished we could have had a better morning to introduce them to the pleasures of birdwatching.

It was quite cold in the wind on the dam wall and the birds were hiding among the leaves. But we had a couple of Yellow-throated Longclaws and a flock of Violet-backed Starlings showing themselves. Yellow-billed Kites, 5 in all, were around, sometimes chased by the inevitable Pied Crows. Abdim's Storks stalked the grassy picnic area. On the dam, everyone saw a pair of African Pygmy-geese and later some saw another 5 pairs. Single Little Grebes, Little Egret, Purple Heron and Black-headed Herons and an African Darter were seen plus 30 Cattle Egret, 5 African Openbills, a couple each of African Spoonbills, African Sacred Ibis, Southern Pochard and White-backed Duck as well as 4 White-faced Duck.

We moved into Haka Park, everyone paid for by Rio Tinto, and split into smaller groups. It was still grey and quite dark making identification quite difficult for new birders and at times there was a light drizzle. Although it was not always easy to see birds and their colours, the folk from Rio Tinto all enjoyed themselves and perhaps began to understand our appreciation of birds.

The final count was a creditable 153 and included 1 Long-crested Eagle, 1 Black-chested Snake-eagle, 2 Steppe Buzzards, an African Marsh-harrier, a Lizard Buzzard and a Little Sparrowhawk plus 40 or so Amur Falcons overhead. Of the cuckoos, only Klaas's Cuckoo and Diderick Cuckoos were seen or heard and, of the lapwings only African Wattled Lapwing. Helmeted Guineafowl were pairing everywhere. Four Spotted Thick-knees were a nice sighting.

This is a wonderful area for woodland birds and most of the usuals were seen or heard though, unusually not Spotted Creeper or Southern Hyliota. All the expected honeyguides were seen and two European Rollers, less expected. More Yellow-throated Longclaws showed themselves around the place as well as 4 Cape Longclaws.

This park is well worth visiting, not only for the birds but also the animals. Take the family for a day's picnicking and enjoy good birding and animal watching as well. We thank Rio Tinto both for sponsoring the day and for the partnership they have developed with BirdLife Zimbabwe. Long may it continue. **Jennifer Carter**

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Quite a lot of water has passed under the bridge since our last general report, despite the lack of rain, so this will come in the form of a rather brief summary of our events, particularly as *Babbler* is now so popular that we're all vying for space.

AISLEBY (QDS 2028B1)

The September outing consisted of the Crosses and I and that in October of a friend and I. Despite the lack of attendance (largely due to fuel prices and shortages, of course) both proved very enjoyable and, as always, rewarding. As usual there were plenty of water birds, though no particular specials, but we had excellent and prolonged views of gallinules [African Purple Swampphen?] and their teenagers, Black Crakes, Common Moorhens and a fluffy adventurous baby, African Jacanas all over the place, and the usual waders from the miniscule Kittlitz's Plovers and rising to Black-winged Stilts.

African Sacred Ibis are back to flashing armpits — no social graces here, though obviously spring is considered to have sprung. Pied Avocets are around in largish numbers on UMGUSA Dam (65+), as are Red-billed Teal and Red-knobbed Coots. Disappointingly not present on either visit were Marabou Storks, vultures or Meves's Starlings. And rather worryingly only one of 'our' two Hadedda Ibis appeared, flying fast, purposefully and (very uncharacteristically) silently — they've been missing for a while.

But something unusual for us down here was a fluster of 13 Cape Crows excitedly fluttering and fussing from dusty pastures on one side of the road to leaping around on leaking sewage pipes on the other. We presumed these were parents and their cousin-brothers and sisters gathered together with the kids.

We noted with delight that following the fire (deliberate) at Bird Dam — where our Hugh Ashton memorial platform stands — the authorities have pulled out the plug and we now have a respectable flow into the dam of delectable sewage water and quite a few birds, including Pied Avocets, have arrived to enjoy it. Long may this (the presence of water, that is) last.

It was a special pleasure to spend mornings at Aisleby with visitors — firstly Carl Beel of Mutare, and then the Mitchells from Karoi Bird Club.

Don't forget to contact us if you find yourself in Bulawayo and would like to get away from it all in the top birding spot in the country! We will be organising a visit there during the Christmas break, to which everyone is welcome. Phone me for details on (09)-246269.

Verreaux's Eagle Weekend — MATOPOS

Our weekend in September at Maleme Rest Camp was reasonably well attended and from a breeding monitoring point of view was a great success. We visited 36 nests and territories in which we saw 13 chicks, most near fledging but one or two lagging behind and still at the fluffy/brown streaky stage. It soon became apparent that the most productive team this year are Harry and his ladies, Pam and Jean, who achieved 3 chicks out of their 3 nests in the beautiful Mtsheli Valley. By contrast, the team suffering from the most egg on its face consists of Penny and myself who since March have meticulously monitored a nest without a single sighting of adults or chicks — until our recent penultimate visit when we thought we heard a chick, and then on this visit discovered that not only did a chick exist but it was almost ready to fledge!

Additional bonuses over the two days were superb views of African Crowned Eagles tarding up their nest, and an African Fish-eagle incubating her one egg, in the trees below Fish Eagle Lodge. One worrying incident was a visit by a film crew intending to use this locality to shoot a plane crash. When challenged by a nameless indignant BE team member about the disturbance factor, the crew admitted that in fact the crash would be faked on a computer and a mere backdrop was required. However this in itself would surely create disturbance with people scrambling up and down the rocks in their high heels with bulky equipment. A full report of the Verreaux's Eagle breeding results will appear next in *Honeyguide* 50(1).

Outing

Several of us, including some very welcome new participants, braved a cruelly cold and windy day to visit Tinus and Sue Steynberg's wonderful oasis on the edge of BULAWAYO consisting of a charming house set in spongy lawns interspersed with stunning aloes and succulents, the farmyard in which lived their horses and Pekin bantams, and a productive vegetable garden and fruit orchard. Despite the weather the place was full of birds – francolins, robins and thrushes, sparrow-weavers, sunbirds and starlings, and hungry Barn Swallows and African Palm-swifts dipping down low over the paddocks. After a very pleasant walk around, Sue treated us to copious cups of tea and delicious muffins on their huge verandah. We had a thoroughly good time and say thank-you to the Tinuses.

Julia Duprée

HAPPY CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY TO EVERYONE FROM MATABELELAND BRANCH

We hope to see lots of you down here in 2004!

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Sunday 26th October 2003: Valley Lodge Hotel and surrounds (QDS 1932B1) on Forbes Border post Road, a few kilometres east of MUTARE.

This month's Sunday outing was kindly hosted by Rob and Barrie Truscott who live on the Valley Lodge Hotel property. This area, generally miombo woodland, was new ground for our Birders and it proved to be a very productive and interesting day out.

A large group of 13 met in the Valley Lodge car park and walked up into the miombo woodland, punctuated by fairly deep, well-vegetated water courses. Wonderful to see the running water after last week's rains in the Mutare area. We were treated to excellent views of the boldly marked Bearded Scrub-robin with its definitive white wing spots; and for good measure and comparison, a White-browed Scrub-robin with his diagnostic white wing bars and streaky breast; and a close-up look at an active Southern Black Tit. Black Cuckoos called vigorously and we had good sightings of a Black Cuckooshrike with his female in attendance nearby. Other birds on our list included Southern Black Flycatcher, Golden-breasted Bunting, Collared Sunbird, African Pygmy-kingfisher, Golden-tailed Woodpecker and Augur Buzzard overhead. Carl Beel saw Cabanis's Bunting once again, to the exclusion of us all!

But, to my mind, the bird of the day was the Magpie Mannikin — these as *Roberts'* and Darryl Plowes informed us are uncommon, gregarious birds, nomadic according to their food supply. The Valley Lodge Hotel property has large thickets of Bindura Bamboo (*Oxytenanthera abyssinica*) along the water courses and these bamboo thickets with their plentiful seed are foraged happily by the Magpie Mannikins. This bamboo had recently flowered; scattering seed prolifically on the ground — the bamboo will then die after flowering. The Magpie Mannikin flocks were fairly large, up to a couple of hundred on rough estimation.

The sun was hot and getting hotter and we happily escaped to the hotel's cool verandah where Barrie had very kindly organized refreshments which were most appreciated.

Our total list for the day was 68 species; all-in-all a splendid morning's birding in peaceful and beautiful surrounds.

Valley Lodge Hotel is the perfect place to stay en route to Mozambique, being only a few kilometers from Forbes Border Post. Plenty of parking for boats and one could even do some early morning birding. Their e-mail address is: vlodge@zol.co.zw

Our grateful thanks to the Truscotts and to Valley Lodge Hotel for their warm hospitality.

Karoi Bird Club

The postal strike has obviously struck the *Babbler* as Merle Mitchell's report, which I eagerly await every two months, has not been received. I hope to include it in the next *Babbler*. Ed.

TAIL FEATHERS

NYANGA 8th – 11th November 2003 (QDS: 1832B2)

A very enjoyable weekend was had at Nyanga last weekend with a total of 94 species being recorded. We stayed in the Ellis cottage No 28 on Connemara Lake. The list includes Rhodes and Troutbeck hotels and the driving around to get to the various places.

On arrival we stopped at Troutbeck Spar to do the grocery shopping for the weekend and 3 White-backed Vultures flew over from the Troutbeck side over the back of Spar. Of particular interest was the adult African Fish-eagle on the lake. The cottage is at approximately 2200m so this is a good record, not only for Nyanga but also as an altitudinal one. I also saw an adult African Fish-eagle over the trout ponds at Troutbeck (very likely the same bird). There were also an incredible 100+ Red-billed Teal on the dam, that spent most of their time in groups of about 20-30 birds and smaller. When the fish-eagle took off, they all called and grouped together into one group of 93 at one end of the dam and another group of between 20-30 birds at the other end of the dam.

On all 3 mornings I watched an Augur Buzzard land on a rock across the dam about 10 meters from a small group of about 10 Red-billed Teal. It would sit for a few minutes then hop down to the water's edge, wade into the lake and proceed to bath. When finished, it would walk out and fly up to the same rock and spend about 30 minutes preening before flying off. I found this interesting because the teals never moved the whole time the buzzard was there, but as soon as the fish-eagle appeared, they all bomb-shelled. (If the fishing was as bad for the eagle as it was for my son and I, maybe the teal were the eagle's food source). There were also Little Grebe 10-20, Southern Pochard 6-8, Red-knobbed Coot 30-40, a lone Common Moorhen, Common Sandpipers 15-20, a pair of Wood Sandpipers and a lone Hamerkop.

I watched a Peregrine Falcon mobbing a pair of displaying Augur Buzzards. The falcon almost seemed as if he was playing a game with them. No contact was made by any party but the very vocal buzzards were clearly unimpressed.

The dam is fairly low and there were four African Wattled Lapwings and a number of displaying pairs of African Pipits along the shoreline. I found this interesting as I have only seen these pipits in short grassland especially on long shooting ranges (Cleveland) and air strips. Speckled Pigeons and African Olive-pigeons landed on the edge of the dam daily to drink.

The aerial feeders, namely swallows, swifts and martins over the dam, were awesome. Blue Swallows 15-20, Common House-martins 10-15, White-throated Swallows 8-10, Wire-tailed Swallows 4, Barn Swallows 8-10, Eastern Saw-wings 10-15, a pair of Greater Striped Swallows, a lone Banded Martin, a lone Mottled Swift, a pair of Scarce Swifts, African Palm-swifts 8-10 and White-rumped Swifts 10-15.

I have never seen so many Blue Swallows. They were calling and doing an unusual display of one bird flying on top of another, slightly behind and calling, as the top bird called the bottom bird would hold its wings upright in a glide and drop its head. It may be common behaviour for people who watch these birds on a regular basis, but I have never witnessed it before.

The moon was full over the weekend and on two evenings I could hear Cape Eagle-owl calling from across the lake. And on the last evening from 6.00 to 6.30 p.m. a Red-eyed Dove called non-stop from the other side of the lake. The 5th Edition *Roberts* has the distribution of this species over the Nyanga area but the SASOL has it omitted. The lady who runs the cottages says they often call in the area, does any one else have records for them up here?

Common residents around the lodge were Olive Bush-shrike (ruddy form), Tropical Boubou, Malachite Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Willow Warbler (very common and numerous), African Firefinch, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Cape Batis, Wailing Cisticola, Bar-throated Apalis, Cape Robin-chat, Dark-capped Bulbul, Red-winged Starling, Cape Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeater and Moustached Grass-warbler. The latter is a first for me and he was in the front garden the whole time we were there, very vocal but shy and retiring when approached.

On a trip to Rhodes hotel, I got Scaly-throated Honey guide calling and visual, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, African Paradise-flycatcher, White-fronted Bee-eaters, a lone Cape Turtle-dove, Amethyst Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds, White-necked Raven, Pied Crows and Cape Crows. There were 5 Mountain Wagtails on the mini "mermaids' pool" rocks by the 'beach'.

I also saw a single Wattled Crane, standing in a marshy looking area about 200m of the road on the 60km peg Nyanga to Rusape. **Grant Nealon**

Gonarezhou National Park, November 2003 (QDS 2132A3)

We have just had a wonderful time on the eastern side of Gonarezhou National Park where over 3 days we managed to tally 205 species of birds. Narina Trogon, Thick-billed Cuckoo and African Emerald Cuckoo, Gorgeous Bush-shrike and Mottled Spinetail were seen daily amongst some other interesting species for the area. Animals were few and far between but we did have a few tense moments with elephants and enjoyed watching a family unit of Nyala.

For the avid fisherman the Black Tilapia and Tigerfish had some of us anglers pitting our skills against these fine finny adversaries.

A cheap camping trip yet wonderful place to visit. **Gary Douglas**

Gairezi Cottages, Nyanga (QDS 1832B4)

My husband and I have had a few days down at the new Gairezi cottages as he is a keen fly fisherman and I dabble in birding. It was well worth the effort with a great activity of birds all either building nests or feeding young. We also saw five Blue Swallows together, of which three appeared to be juveniles with only half grown tails.

Should anyone wish to visit the cottages they should contact Wendy on 091 320676 she does the bookings. It is a campfire project set up by the Gairezi fly fishing club but anyone can stay there at a reasonable fee. The cottages are basic but very comfortable with a gas stove and paraffin deep freeze. They have a wood stove if gas is not available but paraffin is a problem at the moment so you need to arrange your own ice, cold facilities. **Unknown Contributor**

NOTICEBOARD

FIELD OBSERVATIONS FOR HONEYGUIDE

Colin Baker is getting quite a lot of useful info from Field Cards, but would like contributors to please RECORD ACTUAL NUMBERS SEEN. Please also remember to include notes on any exceptional sightings.

Also, please send contributions for Field Obs. to Colin at [redacted] and not to the email address that currently appears in *Honeyguide*.

BABBLER REPORTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Would those submitting reports and observations on bird sightings to *Babbler*, PLEASE TRY TO INCLUDE THE QDS (see the Karoi reports) or enough information (road, mile peg etc.) so that we can work it out. Thanks, Ed.

New Members

Mr. & Mrs. Thornton	Mr & Mrs. Hopley	Clara Musingambanje
Darren Lanca	Mrs. F M Howson	Audrey Cruikshank
D E Adams	Admire Masamba	Nicodemus Makanza
David Nerutanga	Woody Cotterill	

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